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Part of the justification for selling certain advanced weaponry to Saudi Arabia has been that there is a need to strengthen it against the dangers of Soviet expansionism, which you have described as the chief danger to all of the nations in that region. Yet, following your recent trip to Saudi Arabia, high officials of the present regime are reported to have made it clear to you that they do not share the perception that the Soviets are the major danger to the region. Instead, they are reported to have argued that Israel is the major danger to the region. If the Saudis do not share our perception on such a fundamental question and indeed believe that Israel is their real danger, how do you justify selling advanced weaponry such as the AWACS to Saudi Arabia? And what have we asked the Saudis to do to promote a stable and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A. On April 23, Minister Yamani stated in a speech in New York, "To the Saudis, there are only two threats in this world: International Coummunism and Israel. The first helps to reinforce our friendship with America, while the second is a threat to that friendship. It is difficult to conceive of a compromise in a situation like this. The second is far more tangible and more in evidence than the first one, and an actual danger is obviously worse than a potential danger." His remarks should be understood against the background of recent history in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia has never engaged Israel in significant, sustained combat in any Arab-Israel War. Nevertheless, it is true that the Saudis share a view common in the Arab world that Israeli activities have created opportunities for the Soviet Union to expand its influence. The Saudis argue that such Israeli activities as the annexation of East Jerusalem and the establishment of settlements on the West Bank push moderate Palestinian and Arab elements into cooperation with the Soviet Union, which has consistently supported the Arab position on Arab-Israeli issues.

Although we do not agree with the Saudis in this assessment, we do share with them an understanding of the dangers to the Middle East from Soviet activities. The Saudis have in fact, been a leading force in countering Soviet efforts to increase their influence in the area. The Saudis lead the Islamic world in condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They encouraged the forces that led to the expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia. The Saudis are working with us to support the economic and defense needs of North Yemen, as an alternative to its reliance on Soviet arms and aid. There can be no doubt that the Saudis clearly recognize the dangers of Soviet expansionism.

We justify selling the AWACS to Saudi Arabia on the grounds that it is in the interest of Saudi Arabia, ourselves and our non-communist friends that the Saudi oil fields be adequately protected against destruction by air attack. We also justify the sale on grounds that US readiness to assist our friends in the Middle East with their legitimate defense requirements is essential to demonstrate our reliability as a security partner. Helping friends like the Saudis to defend themselves is the first line in building our own defenses in that vital region.

Regarding Middle East peace, the Saudis have said that in their view the Camp David agreements are inadequate for a comprehensive settlement because they do not deal sufficiently with the Palestinian question and the status of Jerusalem. We will continue to seek to bring the Saudis into a more constructive posture in the peace process. In this regard, it is important to sustain their confidence in other aspects of U.S. policy, including our willingness to support their security.